

## Summary of Alaska Court System FY26 Capital Budget Request to Legislature

### ***\$22M for Palmer courthouse expansion (phase two) \*\*\*Top priority for Supreme Court***

**What:** Adding three courtrooms and accompanying offices necessary to accommodate three new (future) judges with support staff. Plan also allows for potential future expansion onto an upper floor.

**Justification/Need:**

- The Palmer courthouse is the busiest in the state. The four superior court judges have had the highest case filings per judge for multiple consecutive years: *In FY24 there were 663 filings per judge, over 200 more filings per judge than the statewide average.*
- Palmer courthouse also has three district court judges and three magistrates (who have limited jurisdiction). The courthouse has only eight courtrooms and only four jury deliberation rooms. Often all courtrooms are full and all deliberation rooms are in use, causing case postponement.
- No new superior court judge has been added in Palmer since 2006.
- Population in the geographic area served by Palmer court has *increased by 50% since 2006* and projections are for an additional *15% population increase by 2035.*
- *Case times to disposition in Palmer for family law matters are almost 50% longer than statewide averages due to the press of caseload on those judges and staff. Anecdotally, due to longer disposition times some residents prefer to file their family law or other cases in Anchorage.*

**Funding History:** In FY 25, the court system received \$7.2M for full design work, site prep, permitting, and utilities (phase one). \$2.5M has been fully encumbered to date and project is in construction design stage. Ground breaking is expected in the next month, site and utilities work will occur in summer 2025.

**Basic Project Description:** Add space for three courtrooms with a configurable hybrid courtroom space for remote hearings and multi-use. Also includes chambers and space for an assistant and a law clerk for each (future) judge. Will include a second-story shell as cost-effective way to further expand if needed.

### *Other Capital Requests from Court System to Legislature*

**Court Security Projects:** \$2.15M for facility and system improvements to protect the public and staff.

**Deferred Maintenance:** \$3.525M for projects in state-owned facilities occupied by the court system.

Governor's capital budget bill did not include most of the Court's requests; it includes only \$1M for court security. The Court believes ALL of its requests should be transmitted to the legislature in the statewide capital budget bill; the governor's office apparently disagrees.

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